

He Was in That Line

By Sasha Ovalle

He told me the stories of how I got to here.
Two generations of scars now entrusted to me.
He spoke sweetly of the grandmother I'd never meet.
Fierce and strong and all of five foot three,
Her sad eyes tilted upwards, always.
They were fixed on a flickering light in a fluorescent lit waiting room.
Such a fitting place to make her case to remain in this country.
His tiny hand clenched tightly in hers,
He was in that line.

Hungry mouths demanding, commanding and not understanding,
Not knowing they robbed her of any dreams of her own.
Not knowing how close they came to losing their home.
Help she was told was a bus ride away.
A government building filled with ammonia smells and judgmental stares.
Food stamps would be the answer to prayer.
Older than his years and fueled by fear, he was their translator.
So they waited and waited for their turn at the window.
He was in that line.

Her only mission to carry her children to there,
Just as his was to carry me to here.
Now I'm the keeper of her dreams, and his as well.
He stood in those lines because they had no choice.
He stood in those lines so I could have a voice.
Now I draw a line to a future I choose.
I am in that line.

A Stain So Deep: The Tragedy of the Salvadoran Civil War

By Sasha Ovalle

Embraced by the sun, hot and humid against my skin.
Seduced by the night sky, and embers that dance in the air.
But these sights belie something else, something sinister within.
There is a heavy weight upon this place that history lays bare.

Green velvet mountains carefully painted over a red stained canvas.
A landscape lined with rent flesh, now remade, renewed and redeemed,
All that was unbearable swept away, replaced by an aching hollowness.
The name of evil no longer on lips aghast, as if undreamed.

Can beauty walk this ground cursed in war by spirits broken?
Can she forget the wretched scent that wafts from the hearts of men?
Can she forgive the murder of innocence and sins unspoken,
While death still roams, engorged and giddy and ready to feast again?

The disappeared souls still wander these streets defiled decades ago.
Amidst the music and laughter, they warn against the minions of hate.
Yet the raucous crowd marches on, ever forward, not seeming to know,
That the horizon before them is marred by the darkness of fate.

Shall I Compare Thee, Covid?

Sasha Ovale

All too feared is the fury of the sea.
Thunderous clamor and colossal might.
A song of swallowed souls and cold cruelty.
Yet compared to thee, merely impolite.

For its trail of ruin, the river reigns.
Cleaving stone from stone with ravenous zest.
Calm belies chaos, deference it feigns.
Such stealth no match for the poisonous pest.

The deadliest of foes floats in the wind.
Eyes squinted miss it alight on a pin.
No innocent droplet, this one has sinned.
Countless lives lost to the weapon within.

Siblings bested by the robber of breath,
The meekest of them, the horseman called death.

Barbie

By Sasha Ovalle

I've been told my whole life that I have one sole purpose.

A life story written for me, not by me.

Why go to school? Why try to excel?

After all, success does not see me.

It is only failure who walks by my side.

Latina, "small and insignificant."

This is what I've been told.

Perhaps, I should simply give up.

I've been warned that if I blaze my own trail,

I will end up alone and abandoned.

So I stay in my lane, stay in my place,

as the world closes in on me,

getting smaller each day.

The many paths before me slowly blend into one.

Perhaps, I should listen to society.

I am to be a modern day Barbie doll.

Sitting, waiting, and eventually married.

Posing with a smile on my face,

I am placed on a shelf, pretty and serene.

A Barbie's plastic is the perfect armor.

Yet inside, I am full of broken parts, broken dreams,

and the question of what could have been.

Prejudice, You're Getting Old!

By Sasha Ovalle

How old are you, Prejudice?

I may need to check.

As old as everything ever?

Old enough to know better.

Spring turns to summer then around the corner comes winter.

And like always you're there, resentful and bitter.

Year after year, while the world grows anew,

You chime in with a few choice words and a bad attitude.

My friends and family you continually berated,

For speaking a language you obviously hated.

Really, the worst neighbor we could ever conceive.

But now we're all grown and you're not making us leave.

We've all gotten bigger.

And our voices are louder.

So keep pointing that finger.

Because as you get older, we only grow prouder.